WHO ARE THE MEN IN BLACK?

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As UFO sightings increase, so allegedly does the harassment of witnesses - by the sinister so-called Men In Black.

Albert Bender, director of the International Flying Saucer Bureau, an amateur organization based in Connecticut, USA, once claimed to have discovered the secret behind UFOs. But unfortunately, the rest of the world is still none the wiser - for Bender was prevented from passing on his discovery to the world by three sinister visitors: three men dressed in black, known as 'the silencers'.

It had been Bender's intention to publish his findings in his own journal, Space Review. But before committing himself finally, he felt he ought to try his ideas out on a colleague. He therefore mailed his report. A few days later, the men came.

Bender was lying down in his bedroom, overtaken by a sudden spell of dizziness, when he noticed three shadowy figures in the room. Gradually, they became clearer. All were dressed in black clothes. "They looked like clergymen, but wore hats similar to Homburg style. The faces were not clearly discernible, for the hats partly hid and shaded them. Feelings of fear left me... The eyes of all three figures suddenly lit up like flashlight bulbs, and all these were focussed upon me. They seemed to burn into my very soul as the pains above my eyes became almost unbearable. It was then I sensed that they were conveying a message to me by telelathy."

Bender's visitors confirmed that he had been right in his speculations as to the true nature of the UFOs - one of them was actually carrying Bender's report, and provided additional information. This so terrified him that he was only too willing to go along with their demand that he close down his organisation,
cease publication of his journal at once, and refrain from telling the truth to anyone 'on his honour as an American citizen.'

But did Bender really expect anyone to believe his story? His friends and colleagues were certainly baffled by it. One of them, Gray Barker, even published a sensational book, 'They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers'; and Bender himself supplied an even stranger account in his 'Flying Saucers and the Three Men' some years later, in response to persistent demands for an explanation of what had occurred from former colleagues.

He told an extraordinary story, involving extraterrestrial spaceships with bases in Antarctica, that reads like the far-fetched contactee dream-stuff; and it has even been suggested that the implausibility of Bender's story was specifically designed in order to throw serious UFO investigators off the track.

However, believable or not, Bender's original account of the visit of the three strangers is of crucial interest to UFO

investigators, for the story has been parelleled by many similar reports, frequently from people unlikely to have heard of Bender and his experiences. UFO percipients and investigators are apparently also liable to be visited by men in black (MIBs); and although most reports are from the United States, similar claims have come from Sweden and Italy, Britain and Mexico. Like the UFO phenomenon itself, MIBs span three decades, and perhaps had precursors in earlier centuries.

VISITATIONS

Like Bender's story, most later reports not only contain implausible details, but are also inherently illogical: in virtually every case, there seems on the face of it more reason to disbelieve that to believe. But this does not eliminate the mystery - it simply requires us to study it in a different light. For whether or not these things actually happened, the fact remains that they were reported; and why should so many people, independently and often reluctantly, report such strange and sinister visitations? What is more, why is it that the accounts are so mimilar, echoeng and in turn helping to confirm a persistent pattern that, if nothing else, has become one of the most powerful folk myths of our time?

The archetypal MIB report runs something like this: shortly after a UFO sighting, the subject - he may be a witness, he may be an investigator on the case - receives a visit. Often it occurs so soon after the incident itself that no official report or media publication has taken place: in short, the visitors should not, by any normal channels, have gained access to the information they clearly possess - names, addresses, and details of the incident, as well as those involved.

The victim is nearly always alone at the time of the visit, usually in his own home. The visitors, usually three in number, arrive in a large, black car. In America, it is most often a prestigious Cadillac, but seldon a recent model. Though old in date, however, it is likely to be immaculate in appearance and condition, inside and out, even having that unmistakable 'new car' smell. If the subject notes the registration number and checks it, it is invariably found to be a non-existent number.

The visitors themselves are almost always men: only very rarely is one a woman, In appearance, they conform pretty closely to the stereotyped image of a CIA or secret service man. They wear dark suits, dark hats, dark ties, dark shoes and socks, but white shirts: and witnesses very often remark on their clean, immaculate turn-out, all the clothes looking as though just purchased.

The visitors' faces are frequently discribed as 'vaguely foreign', most often 'oriental', and slanted eyes have been specified in many accounts. If not dark-skinned, the men are likely to be very heavily tanned. Sometimes there are bizarre touches: in one case, for instance, a man in black appeared to be wering bright lipstick! The MIBs are generally unsmiling and

expressionless, their movements stiff and awkward. Their general demeanour is formal, cold, sinister, even menacing, and there is no warmth or friendliness shown, even if no outright hostility either. Witnesses often hint that they felt their visitors were not human at all.

Some MIBs proffer evidence of identity; indeed, they sometimes appear in US Air Force or other uniforms. They may also produce identity cards; but since most people would not know a genuine CIA or other 'secret' service identity card if they saw one, this of course proves nothing at all. If they give names, however, these are invariably found to be false.

The interview is sometimes an interrogation, sometimes simply a warning. Either way, the visitors, even though they are asking questions, are clearly very well-informed, with access to restricted information. They speak with perfect, sometimes too perfect, intonation and phrasing, and their language is apt to be reminiscent of the conventional villains of crime films.

MENACING ENCOUNTERS

The sinister visits almost invariably conclude with a warning not to tell anybody about the incident, if the subject is a UFO percipient, or to abandon the investigation, if he is an investigator. Violence is frequently threatened, too. And the MIBs depart as suddenly as they came.

Most well-informed UFO enthusiasts, if asked to describe a typical MIB visit, would give some such account. However, a comparative examination of reports indicates that such 'perfect' MIB visits seldom occur in practice. Study of 32 of the more reliable cases on file reveals that many details diverge quite markedly from the archetypal story: there were, for instance, no visitors at all in four cases, only subsequent telephone calls; and, of the remainder, only five involved three men, two involved four, five involved two, while in the rest there was mention only of a single visitor.

Although the appearance and behaviour of the visitors does seem generally to conform to the prototype, it ranges from the entirely natural to the totally bizarre. The car, despite the fact that in America it is by far the commonest means of transportation, is in fact mentioned in only one-third of the reports; and as for the picturesque details - the Cadillac, the antiquated model, the immaculate condition - these are, in practice, very much the exception. Of 22 American reports, only nine even include mention of a car; and of these, only three were Cadillacs, while only two were specified as black and only two as out-of-date models.

On the other hand, such archetypal details tend to be more conspicuous in less reliable cases, particularly those in which investigators, rather than UFO percipients, are involved. The case that comes closest to the archetype is that of Robert Richardson, of Toledo, Ohio, who in July 1967 informed the Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation (APRO) that he had collided with a UFO while driving at night. Coming round a bend, he had been confronted by a strange object blocking the road. Unable to halt

in time, he had hit it, though not very hard. Immediately on impact, the UFO vanished. Police who accompanied Richardson to the scene could find only his own skid marks as evidence; but on a later visit, Richardson himself found a small lump of metal which might have come from the UFO.

Three days later, at 11 pm, two men in their twenties appeared at Richardson's home and questioned him for about 10 minutes. They did not identify themselves, and Richardson - to his own subsequent surprise - did not ask who they were. They were not unfriendly, gave no warnings, and just asked questions. He noted that they left in a black 1953 Cadillac. The number, when checked, was found not yet to have been issued.

A week later, Richardson received a second visit, from two different men, who arrived in a current model Dodge. They wore black suits and were dark-complectioned. Although one spoke perfect English, the second had an accent, and Richardson felt there was something vaguely foreign about them. At first, they seemed to be trying to persuade him that he had not hit anything at all; but then they asked for the piece of metal. When he told them it had gone for analysis, they threatened him: "If you want your wife to stay as pretty as she is, then you'd better get the metal back".

The existence of the metal was known only to Richardson and his wife, and to two senior members of APRO. Seemingly, the only way the strangers could have learned of its existence would be by tapping either his or APRO's telephone. There was no clear connection between the two pairs of visitors; but what both had in common was access to information that was not freely and publicly available. Perhaps it is this that is the key to the MIB mystery.

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[On the page is also a boxed article titled; IN FOCUS
THE MAN WHO SHOT A HUMANOID, reproduced below.]

One inclement evening in November 1961, Paul Miller and three companions were returning home to Minot, North Dakota, after a hunting trip when what they could only describe as 'a luminous silo' landed in a nearby field. At first they thought it was a plane crashing, but had to revise their opinion when the 'plane' abruptly vanished. As the hunters drove off, the object reappeared and two humanoids emerged from it. Miller panicked and fired at one of the creatures, apparently wounding it. The other hunters immediately fled.

On their way back to Minot, all of them experienced a blackout and 'lost' three hours. Terrified, they decided not to report the incident to anyone. Yet the next morning, when Miller reported to work (in an Air Force office), three men in black arrived. They said they were government officials - but showed no credentials - and remarked unpleasantly that they hoped Miller

was 'telling the truth' about the UFO. How did they know about it? 'We have a report,' they said vaguely.

'They seemed to know everthing about me; where I worked, my name, everthing else,' Miller said. They also asked questions about his experiences as if they already knew the answers. Miller did not dare tell his story for several years.

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